

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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O 141543Z MAR 75
FM AMEMBASSY OSLO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9437
SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T OSLO 1041

EXDIS

FOR SECRETARY KISSINGER AND SECRETARY SCHLESINGER

SECDEF HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: BEXP, MASS, NO, NATO
SUBJECT: AIRCRAFT REPLACEMENT ISSUE

REFS: (A) OSLO 954 (B) OSLO 911

SUMMARY: IN IMPORTANT CHANGE OF POLICY, NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT NOW APPEARS PREPARED TO ANNOUNCE DECISION TO ACQUIRE F-16 AND JOIN FOUR-NATION CONSORTIUM. HOWEVER DETAILS RE TERMS OF NORWEGIAN PARTICIPATION IN CONSORTIUM COULD STILL POSE PROBLEMS. FOSTERVOLL WILL VISIT COPENHAGEN AND THE HAGUE THIS WEEKEND TO COORDINATE STRATEGY FOR MARCH 24 MEETING. MY CALL ON PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY LEADER ODVAR NORDLI PROVED HIGHLY EFFECTIVE. END SUMMARY

1. DEFENSE MINISTER FOSTERVOLI INFORMED ME THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS AGREED TO PROCEED WITH THE AIRCRAFT REPLACEMENT ISSUE ON THE BASIS OF THE DRAFT MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) BETWEEN THE US AND THE FOUR CONSORTIUM PARTNERS. IN A SERIES OF DISCUSSIONS THIS WEEK, FOSTERVOLL, FOREIGN MINISTER FRYDENLUND, PRIME MINISTER BRATTELI, PARLIAMENTARY LEADER OF THE LABOR

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PARTY ODVAR NORDLI AND DEFENSE COMMISSION SECRETARIAT

CHIEF ERIC HIMLE HAVE APPARENTLY ADOPTED A STRATEGY DESIGNED TO SURMOUNT DOMESTIC POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES OVER THE ROLE OF THE DEFENSE COMMISSION AND TO SATISFY BOTH US AND CONSORTIUM REQUIREMENTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE MOU. WHILE FOSTERVOLL INDICATED A "SPECIAL AGREEMENT" MAY BE REQUIRED, IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT ANY PROPOSALS WILL BE MADE WITHIN THE MOU CONTEXT. THIS REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT TURN AROUND IN THE NORWEGIAN POSITION. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT HEARD THE LAST OF NORWAY'S PROBLEMS RE TERMS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE FOUR-NATION CONSORTIUM, I AM CONSIDERABLY ENCOURAGED OVER THE LIMMINENT PROSPECT OF NORWAY OPTING FOR ACQUISITION OF THE F-16 WITH THE FOUR NATION CONSORTIUM.

2. FOSTERVOLL RECOGNIZES THE NECESSITY OF COMBINING A DOMESTIC POLITICAL SOLUTION WITH SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS VIS A VIS CONSORTIUM PARTNERS AND THE US. ACCORDINGLY, FOSTERVOLL PLANS TO VISIT HIS DANISH COUNTERPART IN COPENHAGEN ON SATURDAY, MARCH 15, MOVING ON TO SEE DEFENSE MINISTER VREDELING IN THE HAGUE THE FOLLOWING DAY FOR THE PURPOSE OF COORDINATING A STRATEGY FOR THE MARCH 24 MEETING OF MOD'S. FOSTERVOLL'S AIM IS TO RUN A MEETING WHICH WOULD FACILITATE A BELGIAN DECISION TO JOIN THE F-16 CONSORTIUM, ALTHOUGH BRUSSELS IS NOT ON THE MINISTER'S ITINERARY. (KNOWLEDGEABLE NORWEGIANS ARE DISCOURAGED AT PRESENT BELGIAN POSTURE ON AIRCRAFT ISSUE.) CABINET ALSO HOPED FOSTERVOLL COULD HAVE STOPPED IN WASHINGTON AS WELL BUT TIME CONSTRAINTS PRECLUDED A TRANS-ATLANTIC TRIP.

3. FULL CABINET ENDORSEMENT FOR THE NORWEGIAN DECISION TO GEAR ITS POLICIES TO THE MOU HAS NOT YET OCCURRED TO OUR KNOWLEDGE ALTHOUGH WITH BRATTELI, FRYDENLUND, FOSTERVOLL, NORDLI AND HIMLE IN AGREEMENT, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT ANYONE ELSE IN THE CABINET IS KNOWLEDGEABLE OR FORCEFUL ENOUGH TO SUCCESSFULLY OPPOSE THIS COURSE OF ACTION. FOSTERVOLL HIMSELF HAS BEEN ACTIVE BEHIND THE SCENES IN RALLYING SUPPORT AMONG PRO-DEFENSE, NON-SOCIALIST OPPOSITION ELEMENTS. THIS WILL STAND FOSTER-

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VOLL IN GOOD STEAD EARLY NEXT WEEK WHEN HE INTENDS TO CONSULT AND OBTAIN THE SUPPORT OF THOSE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES NORMALLY INVOLVED IN MAJOR SECURITY ISSUES.

4. EARLIER THIS WEEK, I MET WITH LABOR PARTY'S PARLIAMENTARY LEADER ODVAR NORDLI, WHO IS ALSO CHAIRMAN OF THE DEFENSE COMMISSION AND FRONT RUNNER TO SUCCEED BRATTELI AS PRIME MINISTER (SEE REFTELS). NORDLI WAS UNDERSTANDABLY

CONCERNED ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEFENSE COMMISSION TO CONSIDER OVERALL, LONG RANGE DEFENSE BUDGET PRIORITIES WHERE SHIPS, SHORAD'S, AND OTHER IMPORTANT AREAS MUST BE CONSIDERED IN ADDITION TO REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT. I PRESENTED MY CASE TO NORDLI STRESSING ECONOMIC BENEFITS NORWAY WOULD LOSE, UNDESIRABLE NATO AND DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES AND THE TEXT OF THE MOU ITSELF WHICH, WITH ITS BROAD TERMINATION CLAUSES, DOES NOT PREEMPT THE DEFENSE COMMISSION'S ROLE. AS IN MY EARLIER DEMARCHES, I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT MY SESSION WITH NORDLI HAD A DECIDEDLY POSITIVE IMPACT, INCREASED HIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM AND PLACED THE VIEWS OF THE US GOVERNMENT IN USEFUL PERSPECTIVE.

5. IN SUM, MY EARLIER PESSIMISM OVER WHAT APPEARED TO BE AN IMMINENT COLLAPSE OF NORWAY ON THE AIRCRAFT ISSUE HAS DISAPPEARED. BARRING UNFORESEEABLE CATASTROPHE, IT WOULD NOW APPEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO GOING INTO THE FOUR-NATION CONSORTIUM ON THE BASIS OF THE MOU AND, ALTHOUGH SERIOUS PROBLEM AREAS REMAIN, AND UNDESIRABLE TREND HAS BEEN EFFECTIVELY REVERSED. BYRNE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY PROCUREMENT, FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, AIRCRAFT SALES, MEETINGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975OSLO001041
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750090-0229
From: OSLO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750350/aaaabslk.tel
Line Count: 138
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 75 OSLO 954, 75 OSLO 911
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 APR 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <17 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AIRCRAFT REPLACEMENT ISSUE
TAGS: BEXP, MASS, NO, NATO
To: STATE DOD
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006